



From Stockmanship To Beef Industry Trends: Q & A With Curt Pate On Where We Are And Where We Are Going

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The NMSU ACES High and ACES High + programs are value-added programs designed to prepare calves for a healthy and productive transition to their next phase in the production cycle. The programs are off to a good start with nearly 1000 calves enrolled and approximately 750 calves designated for the certified sale scheduled for November 15th at Clovis Livestock Auction in Clovis, NM. The programs stress proper vaccination protocols and adherence to BQA guidelines; aside from vaccination, it is important to consider animal handling and stress in order to produce the healthiest animal possible

For many operations in New Mexico, branding and weaning will be the only times cattle are handled. One of the main goals of any vaccination program is to ensure that healthy calves are being sold. However, high stress animals or animals handled in a high stress manner are more likely to experience increased rates of morbidity and mortality. NMSU recently hosted Ag Days Degree and had the opportunity to bring in Curt Pate to discuss stockmanship. Curt is a world-renowned expert in horsemanship and stockmanship and has hosted clinics throughout the U.S. and internationally. I had the opportunity to sit down with Mr. Pate and discuss a few questions.

Q: What do you feel is the area with the most room for improvement in livestock handling/husbandry on large rangeland operations?

Curt Pate: The biggest challenge I see and hear about range cattle at auction markets and feed yards is cattle don't know how to stop. This is very important for safety and keeping the stress level down on animals as they are going into the next phase of the production system.

Q: Relative to animal handling/husbandry what do you think are the major challenges or opportunities for improvement in the beef industry in the next decade?

Curt Pate: The lack of basic skills in animal care that is learned when dealing with small numbers. We used to start out learning how to care for a horse or a few cows. Now we expect someone with very little experience to take care of hundreds of animals without the skills learned by dealing with small numbers. We need to encourage young people to get involve in 4-H and FFA to learn the basic animal care skills.

Q: The beef industry has been placing more of an emphasis on docility. In your opinion, is there any connection between temperament and a cow's ability to produce in tough environments (limited forage, predators, etc.)?

Curt Pate: We need tough cows for tough environments. We need to keep the cow in the cow that fits the environment. We also need to teach them and their offspring to handle the pressure of the next phase of production (how to stop and sort) and adapt to the next phase of production. This is where stockmanship becomes important and adds value to these animals.

Q: We often hear that consumers are and will become more actively involved in the food production process by demanding more information about where their food comes from. What impacts (if any) do you think this could have on cow-calf operations in the West?

Curt Pate: It will be a positive to those that can adapt and give the consumer what they want. For those that want to tell the consumer what they need, it could create a negative impact, mostly through a lower demand for the product they raise. We need to remember people don't have to eat beef. It's a decision they make, and they have lots of choices.

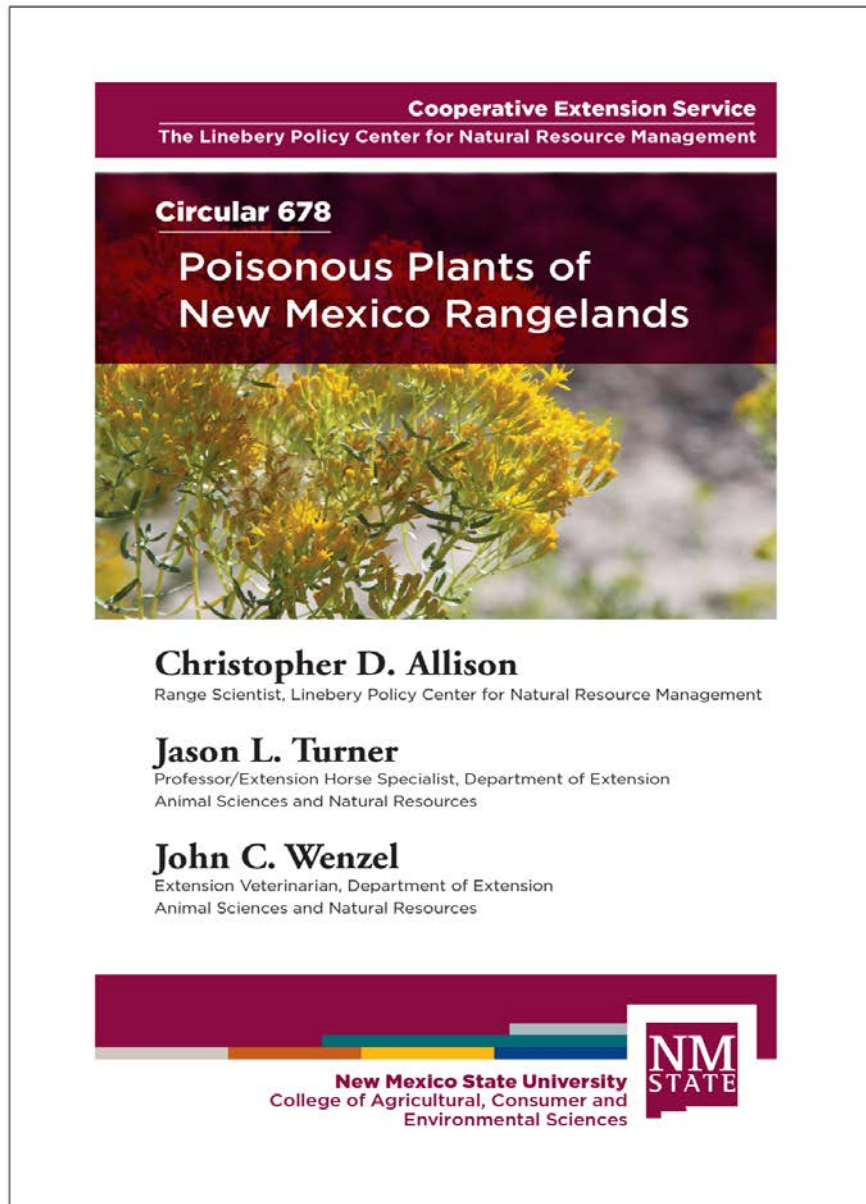
Q: With an aging producer population, what are the major hurdles that limit opportunities for young producers to enter the beef industry?

Curt Pate: We need to change our paradigm of owning real estate and animals to be in the beef business. Land prices have changed to where you can't buy and pay for a place with production. I see such a high quality of life for young people working in the beef industry without the financial stress that so many of the older producers have dealt with. There is such a shortage of quality people with animal husbandry skills, this looks like a way to live a good and prosperous life ahead. It's supply and demand.

Curt Pate: I feel we have shifted so much of our time from working with and caring for animals to using computers and machines in our daily life activities and even caring for animals, that it has diminished our ability to handle and care for them. We need to make a concentrated effort to learn the things that came naturally when animals were the main part of our life. All through time there have been changing skills that were the most valuable for the times. I feel now and in the future those skills are going to be animal handling, grazing and resource management, as well as marketing. We need to focus on these to be valuable and profitable in the future.

Concluding Remarks

It was a great pleasure to have the opportunity to discuss animal husbandry and stockmanship with Mr. Pate. The beef cattle industry is increasingly recognizing the importance of stress and how management and handling contributes to stress. However, most of the work surrounding stockmanship has centered on handling or working animals in confinement. Mr. Pate's observation of teaching cattle to stop is an important one that both ranchers and researchers should consider. The practice of teaching cattle to stop does not occur just in a corral but also out in the pasture. It is a concept that deserves more attention. Lastly, Mr. Pate's observation regarding the lack of basic animal husbandry experience in today's world really highlights the importance of the great work our 4-H, FFA, other Extension personnel, and industry leaders do every day to provide animal experience to New Mexico's youth!



Copies of Circular 678 – Poisonous Plants of New Mexico Rangeland can be obtained from our office; they are \$8.00 each. Call Kathy at (575)646-3326 or email me at kbustos@nmsu.edu and let me know how many copies you would like, and they will be mailed to you. If you would like to use an index number in purchasing one or more, we can also do a JV.

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